

The Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act (S. 1091)
Lead Sponsors: Senators Susan Collins (Maine) and Bob Casey (Pennsylvania)

Grandparents as Caregivers. Approximately 2.6 million grandparents are raising their grandchildren across the nation today. This number is on the rise, which according to some experts is due to the opioid epidemic.

Raising grandchildren can dramatically alter life plans. Many grandparents delay retirement, become socially isolated from their peers, and deplete their nest-eggs and retirement savings to be able to afford school clothes, child care, food and other necessities. Often, grandparents spend time in the courts struggling to sort out custody. Some of these grandparents face additional and unique challenges as their children, the parents of their grandchildren, struggle with substance use disorders. This can be overwhelming for grandparents who expected retirement to be the next phase of life. It also takes a toll on the grandparents' physical and mental health.

Grandparents raising grandchildren frequently point to the need for improved information to help them navigate their new responsibilities, which can include everything from understanding the special education system to learning how to parent in the age of technology.

Bill Summary. The Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act would create an advisory council charged with developing and disseminating information designed to help grandparents raising grandchildren address challenges that may include how to navigate the school system, plan for their families' future, address mental health issues for themselves and their grandchildren, and build support networks. The advisory council, which would sunset in three years, would be comprised of the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Secretary of Education, the Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use, as well as other federal agencies. The advisory council would disseminate comprehensive information on the resources available to help grandparents raising grandchildren. It would also be charged with producing two reports to Congress on findings both about best practices to support grandparents and any identified gaps in resource needs for grandparents raising grandchildren.

Headlines. Grandparents raising grandkids due to the opioid crisis are making headlines:

- The New York Times: "[*Children of Heroin Crisis Find Refuge in Grandparents' Arms*](#)"
- The Wall Street Journal: "[*The Children of the Opioid Crisis: Left behind by addict parents, tens of thousands of youngsters flood the nation's foster care system; grandparents become moms and dads again*](#)"
- Boston Globe: "[*Opioid addiction among parents leads to more grandparents raising grandchildren*](#)"
- CNN: "[*A generation of heroin orphans*](#)"
- AARP June Bulletin (also highlights bill): "[*The New Caregivers: Grandparents Fill Gaps in Drug-Ravaged Families*](#)"

The Aging Committee held a hearing in March 2017, "[*Grandparents to the Rescue: Raising Grandchildren in the Opioid Crisis and Beyond*](#)", which highlighted challenges faced by grandparents raising their grandchildren.

Support. Endorsed by 40 organizations including Generations United, American Association of Pediatrics, AARP, and the National Association of Counties.